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RITUALE ZUR HEILUNG NACH SCHWANGERSCHAFTSABBRUCH

zusammengestellt von Hanna Strack

Hello Rev. Strack

Thank you for sending your writings. I haven't had a chance yet to read them carefully, but they look very interesting. I wanted to respond as soon as possible, though, to your request. I've attached here some **rituals from our All Options Clergy Counseling training and our training in Pastoral Counseling for Reproductive Loss**. They can be adapted in any way that is of use to you. I just ask if you make use of them in any way, that you please give credit to the authors. I hope this is helpful to you. Bonnie

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis, Director of Clergy Programming, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice
608-827-9668 (voice)

You are invited for an evening of reflection on faith and the healing journey. Christian women who have experienced abuse will learn about the stages of healing and how to integrate their spirituality with their healing journey, based on the book **Women Healing from Abuse: Meditations for Finding Peace (Paulist Press)**. The evening will also be beneficial for those who know someone who has been abused or for those who work with abuse survivors. By the end of the evening, participants will have learned a variety of healing methods that they may then use in their daily lives. Books will be available for purchase and signing.

The evening's facilitator, **Nicole Sotelo**, is the author of the book *Women Healing from Abuse*. It is the first book of its kind for Christian women, sharing the stages of abuse recovery through a spiritual lens and offering a daily prayer practice to assist women on their healing journeys. A graduate of Harvard Divinity School, she currently works for Call To Action, a Catholic organization seeking justice in church and society.

1. A Ritual of Remembering and Release

Based on Christian and Adaptations of African-American Cultural Traditions. For any loss that involved a choice.

This ritual may be used after any reproductive loss involving choice. The woman should be encouraged to bring two or three people to support her – her significant other, a friend, or parent(s). Before the ritual the clergyperson should ask the woman to name 3 to 5 of her strengths that she wants to remember and affirm on one piece of paper and on another piece of paper she should write 3 to 5 painful aspects of her life that she wants to release. A plant, water in a container (a wooden bowl or cup is ideal), a white candle, a glass or metal bowl (in which paper can be burned) should be gathered for the ritual and placed on a table. As the ritual begins, the clergyperson should place the list with the woman's strengths in her right hand and the clergyperson should hold the other list with the issues to be released until later in the ritual.

This ritual can be used with just the clergyperson and the woman. In that case, the clergyperson would read the parts designated for those assembled.

Clergyperson: Remembering is a sacred and time honored task. One of the ways we heal our brokenness and embrace wholeness is to remember. Beloved, as we remember, know that God remembers us also. As a sign of remembering and to bless the memory of those who have gone before us, let us offer libations.
(As water is poured onto a plant symbolizing the ground, the names of ancestors are called out. The woman is asked to name family members who are her ancestors and others who are present may do so also. After each name, those who are assembled respond by saying “Amen” or “Ashe” (a-shay) which is a Yoruba term that means “so be it.” Following the offering of libations, the minister offers a prayer of thanksgiving.)

Prayer:

God of ancestors and God who is parent of us all, we thank you for being present to us as we remember those who have gone before us. We thank you for the examples of courage and kindness and of perseverance and power. We thank you for the reminder that we are a part of the circle of life. We can learn from those who have gone before us and those who follow us will learn from us. As we seek healing and wholeness, help us to remember – to remember who we are and whose we are. Help us to remember our strengths and gifts. (Pause) Help us to remember that we are a gift and to remember the promise of God to be with us always. God remembers us and loves us. We stand in the power of our African tradition by remembering and we come in the name of Jesus asking to be remembered and to be held in love and grace of God. We pray this prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ, the ancestor of us all. And so it is. Amen and Amen.

Woman: Today, I remember. In remembering, I embrace my faith and African principles that empower me to choose. I choose because God has entrusted me with the power of choice. I choose for myself thereby I am living the principle of kujichagulia, one of the Nguzo Saba (The Seven Principles of Kwanzaa). Kujichagulia means self-determination. It teaches Black people to name themselves and their reality and to choose for themselves. I am naming my reality and choosing for myself.

Assembly: We bless you as you remember and as you call upon your faith and the principles that uphold you.

Woman: In this moment, I am remembering that somebody prayed for me, somebody had me on their mind and prayed for me. I am so glad they prayed for me.

Silence

In the fullness of this moment I remember my choices and the power of my own voice.

Silence

In this moment of remembering myself, I remember those who have gone before me. I hear the voices of my ancestors. I hear their cries and their laughter. I feel their pain and their joy.

Silence

In this moment I remember my strengths – they are gifts. I remember that I am a gift and I thank God.

Silence

In this moment, I remember God. I remember God’s mercy, God’s love and God’s grace.

Assembly: We bless you for remembering. Without memory, we are left bereft of our place in the world. You are not alone.

Clergyperson: God calls upon us to remember our connectedness to God and one another. God also calls upon us to release our burdens – those challenges that would disconnect us from the peace God intends for us – those things that would weigh us down and oppress us. Jesus said, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 11:28) We can release all of our burdens to God – our doubts, fears, pain, anger, sadness, grief

*(The list with the issues to be released should be given the woman.)

Woman: I give my burdens to God. (Looking at her list) I release all things that might weigh me down or oppress my mind, body or spirit. I release all things in the name of Jesus. And so it is. Amen and amen. (The list is placed in a bowl and burned.)

Assembly: We bless you for releasing those things that would oppress you. For if God makes you free, you are free indeed.

Clergyperson: You have remembered your strengths, and those who have gone before you; you have remembered who you are and whose you are. Your faith and the voices of your ancestors call you to remembrance and to the freedom that comes from release and from captivity of any kind. You have remembered yourself. Continue to remember. You have released those things that would cloud your vision of yourself; you have released those things that would deceive you about your purpose and your promise. In the days ahead, should you lose focus, release anything that blocks your vision of yourself or God. In this moment, experience and hold in your heart the liberation and the love that comes from God. Amen.

Prepared by the Rev. Dr. Alethea Roselyn Smith-Withers, Baptist minister, Washington, DC

Feel free to edit and use this as you deem appropriate. The ritual may be freely reproduced for the purpose of pastoral counseling only.

2. Ritual of Naming and Healing before or after an abortion

Purpose: To name prevalent emotional elements in considering an abortion, having an abortion, or coping after an abortion. This example will list four common emotions: hope, sorrow, relief and loss. This is not an exhaustive list of what women feel; be sure to acknowledge other significant feelings which a counseling client shares.

This ritual is malleable, and it is merely an example of how to perform a healing ritual with multiple participants. Ritual participants can include the woman and her friends, family and partner. This ritual can also be easily modified to include only the clergy counselor and the counseling client. What follows are the basic suggestions for the ritual; the specifics of the ritual will rise organically from the particular story of those involved. This ritual does not include written liturgy. Rather, suggestions are made as to what the clergy may want to say and when.

Preparation for the ritual:

1. It is helpful to discuss some or all of the following questions when preparing for the ritual, although they may have been covered during counseling:

◇ What are your prevalent feelings about your abortion decision or experience?

◇ How are you coping with the feelings? What do you do that gives you peace and comfort?

◇ What does your spirituality, theology or faith tell you about abortion?

◇ How do your spiritual thoughts about abortion fit in with your spirituality as a whole?

◇ Why do you want to have a ritual? What do you want to get out of this ritual? What do you want to feel afterwards?

2. Give each participant four pieces of paper, each a different color. Each color corresponds to one of the common feelings which have been identified previously. Each participant is asked to write a word, statement or phrase which finishes the sentences “Hope is . . .”, “Sorrow is . . .”, “Relief is . . .” and “Loss is . . .” Participants may write whatever they choose (personal statement, poetic image, description, prayer, etc.). The paper will then be placed in four bowls or containers according to color.

3. Have participants bring significant or symbolic items to the ritual space, and create an altar together. Partners, friends and family members can be asked to bring items which remind them of the woman's strength, love, commitment, etc.

Ritual:

Participants gather around the altar. Music may be helpful to focus the group.

Litany: The clergyperson may want to write a litany based on things said by the participant(s) in counseling. The litany can be made up of important revelations, strong feelings, favorite Scripture passages or significant questions. The litany may list the reasons why the woman is considering abortion or has chosen abortion.

Thanksgiving prayer:

The clergyperson may want to say a prayer of gratitude for the woman and her gifts, for the support of her friends and family, for the sharing of her story and truth, for the clinicians who helped her through her abortion, for her faithfulness to her God, etc.

Naming and witnessing ritual:

The four bowls will be passed around the circle. Each participant will choose one piece of paper from each bowl. Moving around the circle, everyone will read from the papers, one at a time. Once all have been read, participants are asked to rip up the colored paper and scattered the new pieces on the altar. At this time, the clergyperson may choose to say some words about this act symbolizing how abortion is one part of a whole life with God, this choice will integrate into the woman's life as a faithful person, etc.

Silent meditation

Alternatively, there are some guided meditations that help a woman reflect on her experience and discover what the gift of the pregnancy is. (see www.pregnancyoptions.info/healingafter)

Ritual of releasing and remembering:

A pile of stones and a large bowl of water will be set on the altar. Participants are invited to take a stone home with them (as a symbol of remembering what has been experienced and heard) and are invited to take a stone and drop it in the bowl as a symbol of “letting go,” of allowing our stories and emotions to return to the God, Christ, Spirit or cosmos from which they came.

Blessing:

Close with a blessing of the participant(s).

Created by Kathleen George Kearney for the 1999 Mankato Women and Spirituality Conference, Mankato, Minnesota

3. A Litany of Assurance Christian tradition. Post-abortion

Person One: O God, I have been afraid. My world sometimes seems chaotic, and I sometimes feel all alone. I have faced difficult options, and I needed you.

Person Two: I join with other people of faith in believing that whatever decisions you have made or will make the caring support of your religious community, family, and friends should always be yours.

Person One: O God, I have been confused, and sometimes I still feel confused. It's hard to know what is right and what is wrong in difficult situations. Sometimes life seems so unfair.

Person Two: God says, know that you are my Beloved Daughter in whom I am well-pleased [Luke 3:22 edited]. If I your God am for you, who is against you? It is I your God who justifies, and my judgment is far more unfair - in your favor! -- than all the unfairness of life. [Romans 8:31, 33 edited]

Person One: O Lord, I have been brought up to think certain things were true, to revere life, to work for good. I feel I have disappointed you, other people, and myself. I feel like such a failure.

Person Two: Who is to condemn? Only Christ Jesus who descended into hell and rose again on the third day, according to the Apostles' Creed, to demonstrate that all the hells we go through or put ourselves through, do not have the final word. There are no final words with God, only new words of assurance, grace, and hope.

Person One: O God, I feel I have sinned. I sometimes feel separated from you and your will for me in my life. Sometimes I just feel so bad.

Person Two: Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword, or abortion under any circumstances? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us. [Romans 8:35, 37 edited]

Together: We are convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. [Romans 8:38, 39 edited]

Blessing (Person Two may lay hands on the head of Person One.)

Person Two: Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace. [Luke 8:48]

Prepared by the Rev. Lindsay Louise Biddle, Presbyterian minister, Minneapolis, Minnesota Feel free to edit and use this as you deem appropriate.

4. Episcopal Rite for Pregnancy Loss or Stillbirth

Opening Sentences and Prayers

Officiant

In the name of God, the giver of Life
who creates and loves us all.

The Lord be with you.

People

And also with you.

Officiant

Let us pray.

Loving God, source of Life and Love, we come before you this day with aching hearts. We had hoped to gather in the midst of your holy people to celebrate with N. and N. the birth of their child. Instead, we are here to mourn with them this unexpected and profound loss. O Lord, we cannot understand why this gift has been snatched away, and we pray that your Holy Spirit be present with us as we gather here this day. Bless N. and N. with the assurance of your love, and fill them with the knowledge that you are a companion to them in their grief. We ask this in the name of your own Child who died and rose again, Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

N. and N., we are here with you today to acknowledge your loss, to be with you in your sorrow, and to be a sign of God's assurance that you are loved.

This segment should be included only if the family is comfortable with the idea of naming and representing the child. In the case of stillbirth, the parents may opt to have the child's body present, in which case the representation will not be necessary.

The psalmist and the prophets promise that God knew your child while *she* was still in *N.*'s womb, and called the child by name. What name have you given to your child?

N./N.: We have named our child *N.*

N. and N., as you prepared your home to receive *N.,* you gathered those things that would keep *her* warm, happy, and healthy. You are invited to present now that which represents for you the child you have lost.

The parents may present a toy, a piece of clothing, a plant, or some other item that will be prominently displayed for the remainder of the service.

N./N.: We present this _____ as a symbol of our child, *N.*

Let us pray.

God, you have searched us out and known us, and we are yours. We dedicate to you the child, *N.,* beloved [though never seen] by her parents. We are limited, O God; we cannot see as you see.

[Therefore we present to you this _____ as a symbol of the child, *N.*] We ask that you be present to us now as we listen to your Word, that we might hear in it the assurance of your love and companionship at this time. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Readings

The parents, if able, or the officiant may choose two or three of the following readings.

Hebrew Scriptures

Isaiah 43:1-4a

Isaiah 49:15-16a

Jeremiah 29:11-13a

Psalms

23 or 91:1-4 or 121

New Testament

Romans 8:38-39

1 John 3:1-2a

Revelation 21:1-5

Gospel

Mark 4:35-39

Luke 9:46-48

John 6:37-39

Homily and Reflections

The officiant may here offer a brief homily or allow the parents to express their own feelings and thoughts. Silence may be kept.

Prayers

Officiant Let us pray.

Lord, you have blessed us with feeling and emotions, allowing us to love as you love, but also to grieve as you grieve. We bring before you the many conflicted emotions within us, and ask you to bless them to be a source of strength even among the sorrow. *Amen.*

If possible, the following litany will be read alternately by the parents, petitions by one, response by the other.

We bring to you our anger, Lord, which keeps us from turning to you for comfort.

Bless us in our anger, O Lord.

We bring to you our confusion, Lord, as we try to make sense of this senseless loss.

Bless us in our confusion, O Lord.

We bring to you our pain, Lord, as we ache for the child we will never hold.

Bless us in our pain, O Lord.

We bring to you our sorrow, Lord, in the unfulfilled hopes and dreams for this child.

Bless us in our sorrow, O Lord.

We bring to you our emptiness, Lord, the hole left in our home and hearts.

Bless us in our emptiness, O Lord.

We bring to you our loneliness, Lord, where we feel exiled from consolation and comfort.

Bless us in our loneliness, O Lord.

Officiant

God of compassion and companionship, N. and N. now stand before you in the fragile beauty of their humanity. Bless them in their anger, confusion, pain, sorrow, emptiness, and loneliness. Grant them assurance that nothing can separate them from your love. Grant them peace of mind in their confusion and healing in their pain. Grant them consolation in their sorrow, fill them with your Holy Spirit in their emptiness, and grant them companionship in their journey. Assure them that as the world rushes by, unaware, Jesus will stop by the wayside and be with them.

Officiant [takes the item representing the child from the parents, and] joins the hands of the parents with one another.

God, we release to you this child, lost to the world but found in your presence. Enfold N. (this child) in the arms of your mercy. Renew the bond between N. and N., that they do not find their hands empty. We ask your Holy Spirit to fill N. and N., that they may be honest with each other in their sorrow and pain, patient with each other in their fragility, forgiving each other when their pain causes them to lash out. Let them be a source of strength and love for each other.

Bless their families and friends and all those whose hearts are filled with sadness at this loss. Grant them the assurance that comes with the hope of Resurrection. Grant to all those who sorrow the spirit of faith and courage, that they may have the strength to meet the days to come with steadfastness and patience, not sorrowing without hope, but trusting in your goodness; through the one who is the Resurrection and the life, Jesus Christ our Savior. *Amen.*

The Lord's Prayer may be recited here.

If the officiant is a priest, an appropriate benediction is said, then

Go forth in peace, in the knowledge and love of Christ.

People: Thanks be to God.

By The Rev. Nancy L. Moore, found in Women's Uncommon Prayers: Our Lives Revealed, Nurtured, Celebrated.

Elizabeth Rankin Geitz, Marjorie A. Burke, Ann Smith (eds.). Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2000.

The opening sentences and portions of the final prayer are from A New Zealand Prayer Book. From the Episcopal Church: "http://www.episcopalchurch.org/41685_55316_ENG_HTML.htm"

www.episcopalchurch.org/41685_55316_ENG_HTML.htm

5. A Ritual for Healing and Wholeness After an Abortion (Christian tradition)

This Christian ritual is intended for use when counseling a woman who has had an abortion and feels the need for closure and/or forgiveness. The woman should be encouraged to invite her partner, family members or friends to participate if they are affirming of her abortion decision. (C) signifies the clergyperson or lay minister, (W) signifies the woman making the decision, (O) signifies others in attendance. A candle, matches, water, and oil are necessary. If desired, Holy Communion can be included as part of this ritual.

Opening Words

C) Blessed are you, O Holy One, for your presence with (name).

(Clergyperson lights candle.)

We light a candle to signify the presence of the Holy Spirit here now, and with (name) always.

Antiphonal Reading

C) Our help is in the name of the Lord

W/O) who made heaven and earth.

- C) Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength,
W/O) they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
C) they shall run and not be weary,
W/O) they shall walk and not faint.

Prayer

C) Let us pray: Merciful God, we ask you today to renew and make whole your beloved daughter (name), who has made the difficult decision to terminate a pregnancy. We are saddened that the (name's) circumstances made this decision necessary. It was not simple, it was not painless, but it was the best decision she knew how to make. She carries the weight of the decision in her heart. We call on you now to make your presence known to (name), to surround her with your healing power and lift the weight from her heart with the power of your love. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

Reflection

C) In the book of Luke, we read of a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. In those days, a bleeding woman was considered to be unclean and sinful, a pariah. No one would touch or be touched by a bleeding woman for fear of contamination. As Christ walked through the pressing crowd, the woman reached out and touched his garment, and was healed immediately. Feeling his healing power going forth, Jesus asked, "Who touched me?" Eventually, the frightened woman came trembling and fell at his feet. She was no doubt afraid that Jesus would be angry at her for defiling him. Yet, in the presence of a crowd who would judge her sinful, Jesus said: O, Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace.

(Clergyperson takes water, makes a cross on W's forehead)

(Name), this water represents the love of Jesus Christ, which is poured down upon you now and always, for eternity. No matter what you do, or how far you go, you can never separate yourself from Jesus' love.

(Clergyperson takes oil, anoints W's forehead)

(Name), this oil represents the healing power of Jesus Christ, which will renew your spirit. Give yourself over to the Great Physician, the Wonderful Counselor, he will nurture you and make you whole.

Psalm 121

W) I lift my eyes to the hills ?
from where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
who made heaven and earth.

C) He will not let your foot be moved;
he who keeps you will not slumber.
He who keeps Israel
will neither slumber nor sleep.

W) The Lord is your keeper;
the Lord is your shade at your right hand.
The sun shall not strike you by day,
nor the moon by night.

C) The Lord will keep you from all evil;
he will keep your life.
The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in
from this time on and forevermore.

Prayer

C) Let us pray: God of love and mercy, deliver (named) from despair, sadness and grief. Grant her your perfect peace in her past decisions, and fill her with your Holy Spirit, so that she may claim the life you offer in Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen. **(Clergyperson blows out the candle.)**

Benediction

C) **(Name)**, this candle is for you to keep. Whenever you burn it, may you be reminded of God's constant presence in your life and steadfast love. Go in peace with God.

TEXTS CITED IN THE RITUAL FOR HEALING AND WHOLENESS AFTER ABORTION:

Psalm 124:8 Isaiah 40: 31 Isaiah 40: 31 Luke 8:43-48 Psalm 121

This ritual was developed by the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice of Minnesota, January, 1993, for use by the Options Clergy Counseling Service. It may be freely reproduced for the purpose of pastoral counseling only.

6. Healing From Abortion - Jewish tradition

Order of the ritual

Opening

The ritual begins with one woman inviting all to take a few deep breaths. She then begins a niggun (wordless melody). Participants stand in a circle.

Creating Supportive Space

The “focus” woman, for whom the ritual is being conducted, steps into the center of the circle, with one or two women near her to hold her hand and comfort her, and says:

Hinneni – Here I stand alone, as before, when I made my decision about childbearing in the uniqueness of my personal choice.

All other participants approach and tighten the circle around the “focus” woman to support her. Women say together:

You are not alone now. In aloneness you made your choice, and in community you will be sustained.

Affirming One’s Choices

One woman says: It is the blessing and the curse of being human that we have the capacity to make choices. Sometimes the choices are filled with pain, or it feels as though we have no choice at all. Nothing can make the ending of a pregnancy easy. We affirm you in your painful and difficult choice.

Women say together: Blessed are you, Creator of the Universe, who sustains us in times of decision. You have made it possible for us to consider with wisdom our lives and the lives of our loved ones, and you have granted us courage and intelligence to make choices about childbearing. As you have been with us in times of past decisions; so may you be with us today as we affirm the difficult decisions _____ [and her family] has [have] made.

“Focus” woman says:

Barukh attah adonai eloheinu melekh ha’olam, asher natan lasekhvi vina lhavhin bein yom uvein lailah.

I bless you , Holy One, Sovereign Spirit of the Universe, who has enabled me to distinguish between night and day, who has given me the ability to make wise choices.

Women respond: Amen.

Sharing the Pain

One woman says: We know that there is deep sadness within you. We know that you feel loss and sorrow and regret. We mourn with you.

“Focus” woman is invited to share her own words about her grief. She may also wish to express any regret, guilt, doubt, uncertainty, or resentment that arose while making the decision to terminate the pregnancy. The intention here is for the focus woman to be heard and to “let go”.

Option A: In the event of a medically-recommended abortion, one woman says: We know the Torah teaching: When we must choose between a being not yet born and the life of a mother, the choice is very clear. The being you were carrying could not be. No human hand caused this to happen; no human act could have allowed this being to emerge in health and wholeness. Still, in the shadow of such a choice, we feel small and limited and out of control.

Women say together: We who stand with you today are witness to the terrible choice that was no choice at all. We affirm you in choosing life. You made a choice, choosing life for you. We grieve with you over the loss of this seed of life, and we affirm your essence, as a person gifted with the ability to nurture other life- within yourself, in your love for others, and in your connections to family, friends, and community.

One woman chants an adapted El Maleh Rahamim:

El maleh rahamim, shokhen bameromim, hamtzeh menuhah nekhonah tahat kanfei hashekhinah, et nishmat hatinoket/hatinok shelo noldah/nolad le’olameinu. Anna, ba’al harahamim, hastirehah/hastirehu b;eseter kenafekha le’olamim, utzeror bitzror hahayyim et nishmatah/nishmato, adonai hu nahalatah/nahalato, veyavi’eha/veyavi’ehyu leshalom. Venomar amen.

O God filled with womb-like compassion, who resides in the high places, grant perfect peace in Your sheltering Presence, to the soul of this being who was not born into our world. Please, compassionate Mother-God, shelter her/him beneath Your protective wings for all eternity and bind his/her soul to the Bond of Life. The Holy One is now his/her home and will bring her/him eternal peace. And let us say, Amen.

Option B: In the event of a decision to terminate the pregnancy for reasons other than medical, women say together: May You who share sorrow with Your creation be with _____ now as she experiences the loss of potential life. We are sad as we think of her painful decision, and support her as she and we imagine what might have been.

Life is a fabric of different emotions and experiences. Now, O God, while _____ experiences life's bitterness and pain, be with her and with us, and sustain us. Help us to gather strength from within ourselves, from each other, and from our wider community. Blessed are You, Divine Presence, who shares sorrow with Your creation.

Affirming One's Self

(After option A or B continue here)

"Focus" woman says: Elohai, neshamah shenatatta bi tehorah hi. Attah veratah, attah yetzartah, atah nefahtah bi, ve'attah meshammerah bekirbi°

My God, the soul You have given me is pure. You created it, You formed it, You breathed it into me.

I know that I am created b'tzelem elohim, that a divine spark resides within me. I know that I am free to make choices – about my body and my future. I have made my choices, painful as they may be, in harmony with the divinity that dwells within me. I affirm my freedom, I affirm my self, and I honor my choices in the face of enormous complexity and still-lingering questions.

Barukh attah adonai, she'asani ishah. Barukh attah adonai, she'asani bat-horin.

I bless You, Holy One, who has made me a woman. I bless You, Holy One, who has made me free.

Surviving and Being Thankful

"Focus" woman says: The Holy One "heals the broken in heart and binds their wounds" (Ps.147:3) I have survived a sad journey – with peril to both body and soul. I thank You for sustaining me and bringing me through the peril in wholeness.

"Focus" woman reads or sings (Hebrew or English, as is comfortable for her) Birkat Hagomel (dedicated to Ira Silverman, of blessed memory) Hebrew and English are both to be sung to the melody of the traditional American folk song, "The Creole Girl"

Avarekh et ein hahayyim yotzerert tov vara. Akaddesh et hei ha'olam yotzer afelah ve'orah. Avarti begei tzalmavet ve'attah immadi. Modah ani lakh shehezeitini beshalom.

I shall bless the Source of Life who fashions good and evil. I shall bless the Holy One who brings dark and light to all people. For I have walked in the valley of the shadow of death. And You, and You were with me then, with every painful breath.

Seeking Healing

"Focus" woman moves from her place in center of circle. All women greet and embrace her. They respond to her Birkat Hagomel by repeatedly chanting in Hebrew Moses' prayer for Miriam's healing, as long as the power of the chant moves them:

El na refa na lah°El na refah na lah°

Please God, heal her please°Please God, heal her please° "Please God, heal her please

Please God, heal her please

(Numbers 12:13)

Chanting subsides and women flow right into singing Debbie Friedman's adaptation of a traditional prayer for healing:

Mi Shebeirach

"Mi shebeirach imoteinu

M'kor habracha l'avoteinu

May the source of strength

Who blessed the ones before us,

Help us find the courage

To make our lives a blessing,

And let us say, Amen.

"Mi shebeirach avoteinu

M'kor habrachah l'imoteinu,

Bless those in need of healing
With r'fua shleimah
The renewal of body,
The renewal of spirit,
And let us say, Amen.

After a moment of silence, one woman says: "Thank you all for sharing your love and support with _____ at this difficult time."

Rabbi Leila Gal Berner. In *Lifecycles: Jewish Women on Life Passages & Personal Milestones*, Vol. I, ed. Rabbi Debra Orenstein, Jewish Lights Publishing, Woodstock, Vermont, 1998, pp. 127-132 Reprinted here with permission of the author. It may be freely reproduced for the purpose of pastoral counseling only. For rituals on miscarriage, stillbirth, abortion, and infertility from the Conservative Movement of Judaism, see the Rabbinical Assembly's Rabbi's Manual, *Moreh Derekh*, Vol II, I-3 to I-42, and for adoption, F-12 and A-11.

7. Mizuko Kuyo - Buddhist Ritual for Stillborn, Miscarried, or Aborted Fetus (Wasserkinder)

In Japan, the mizuko jizo Buddha takes care of and represents stillborn, miscarried and aborted fetuses. Unique to Japan, the ceremonies surrounding the jizo were created and developed by women. Over the centuries, the image of the mizuko jizohas changed, from a dignified, adult figure, to a serene looking monk-child with a Buddha smile. The jizo has a double purpose. The image both represents the soul of the deceased infant/fetus, and is also the deity who takes care of children on their otherworld journey. The ritual of honouring the fetus or stillborn is called mizuko kuyo. The word mizuko means "water child," or "deceased infant/fetus," and kuyo means "memorial service."

In Japan, water is both an acknowledgement of death and an expression of faith in some kind of rebirth. When the fetus or newborn dies, it goes from the warm waters of the womb to its former liquid state, in which it prepares itself for an eventual rebirth. Historically, mizuko were buried beneath the floorboards of houses, where they were thought to mingle with the water of natural springs, which then carried them to larger bodies of water beneath the surface of the earth, which held special significance as receptacles of life.

The most common days for mizuko kuyo are during the three traditional holidays when offerings are made to ancestors: bon in the summer, and at the spring and summer equinoxes. The mizuko kuyo can be performed in different ways. Many Buddhist temples in Japan have special sections where a woman who can afford to may buy a tomb for her mizuko. The tomb consists of a stone, on top of which stands a carved figure of a jizo, generally wearing a red bib, and carrying a staff with rings or a stick with bells on top (which he uses to help the mizuko who can't yet walk). On the stone is written a kaimyo - a name given to a person after death.

These sites are not somber graveyards. In fact, they are often quite "happy" places. Some of the cemeteries are equipped with playgrounds for children. While the children play, women (and sometimes men) bow, observe moments of silence, and ladle water over the mizuko jizo in an act of ritual cleansing. At times they may light a candle or a few sticks of incense, decorate the tombs with flowers, pinwheels and other toys, drape garments over the jizo, and even erect umbrellas over his head to keep off the rain.

Another type of memorial service for fetuses involves the use of ema. Ema are wooden plaques, often with roof-shaped tops, that are hung by string in special areas of temples and shrines. Many ema carry prayers for, and messages to, aborted fetuses. These prayers and messages often take the form of Yasuraka ni nemutte kudasai (please sleep peacefully), or Gomen ne (please forgive me). Most of them are signed haha (mother), but sometimes the father, or the entire family, will sign as well.

The oldest form of memorial is maintained by women in communities, who tend to jizo shrines on street corners and roadsides. Women take turns putting out flowers, offering food, washing the statue(s), and lighting incense. Women passing them can stop for a short act of kuyo, or simply bow to the jizo.

Women can also perform the mizuko kuyo at home, in front of their ancestral shrines. First they buy a kaimyo from a priest, who will write the name on anihai, a mortuary tablet. The tablet is then placed in the ancestral alcove of the family, and given memorial services along with other ancestors. The fetus will be honoured with reverential bows, and, in pious Buddhist homes, a prayer will be recited. This prayer, perhaps the Heart Sutra, the Kannon Sutra, or the Lotus Sutra, is made to both jizo and the fetus at the same time.

In Japan, abortion is seen as a necessary sorrow, a painful social necessity, and a means for protecting what are felt to be "family values." Some Buddhists worry that abortions could become trivialized, which would lead to a hardening of people's hearts. The mizuko kuyo serves a positive, therapeutic role, keeping people in touch with their emotions and their loss.

For more information: *Liquid Life: Abortion and Buddhism in Japan*, by William R. LaFleur.

Goat-in-the-Road 1821 Shoreline Highway, Muir Beach, CA 415.388.5572
www.goatintheroad.org/Jizo.html

"Goat-in-the-Road" is a Place for Buddhist Practice providing retreats in Buddhist meditation, teaching the Buddha Dharma and offering ceremonies, including A Ceremony for Children Who Have Died. The Ceremony for Children Who Have Died (Jizo, Jizo Ceremony, Gizo, mizuko kuyo) offers an opportunity to address issues such as abortion, SIDS, miscarriage, stillbirth, death after birth, life-threatening illnesses, death and dying, loss, grief, and grieving. Yvonne Rand, a lay householder priest, is the resident teacher.

Great Vow Zen Monastery P.O. Box 368 Clatskanie, OR 97016 USA 503-728-0654
www.greatvow.org

Remembrance Ceremony for Those Who have Died

To help families and friends in their process of grief, we honor lost loved ones with a ceremony in the Jizo Remembrance Garden. Jizo Bodhisattva is regarded as a guardian of women, travelers, and children who have died. We will spend time making a personal memorial for our child, by writing a message, making a simple toy or necklace, or sewing a small garment. There will be materials available, but you may wish to bring scissors, thread and needle, and a small piece of red cloth. Many people also bring a picture of the loved one or other personal token of remembrance which are left on the Jizo statues. The ceremony is very simple, and done in silence. Open to people of any religious affiliation. Families and friends are welcome to revisit the garden any time.

8. Guided Meditation on Loss (For Abortion or Adoption, or may be adapted to other losses)

Loss or grief are associated with abortion or adoption for many women. For some it may be mild. For others it may be deep. Yet our society has no formal way to get support from others or get recognition for our feelings. You may even wonder if you have a right to be supported. After all, you may think, "It was my choice."

If you are having any of those thoughts, take a moment to remember how the process of deciding what to do with a pregnancy has been for you. Can you have compassion for yourself and appreciate the love and care with which you have made this decision? You deserve understanding and comfort no matter what your choice.

This guided imagery is designed to help you recognize what losses you may be feeling, and to release them gently.

On Loss

Begin by getting comfortable -- lie down if you can, or at least have your head supported. Breathe deeply and slowly. Notice your breathing -- inhaling and exhaling. No need to change it.

As you breathe in, know that you breathe in everything you need to release your losses. As you breathe out, let go of anything you don't need for this process. Notice how each breath helps you relax even more deeply. Notice how your body is resting comfortably and peacefully against the soft cushion beneath you. It is good to know that each sensation in your body helps you in becoming even more relaxed and peaceful.

Imagine a beautiful light surrounding your feet. It moves gently and gradually up and through your body and out the top of your head, leaving you feeling safe, secure, centered, and with a sense of well-being. Take your time. That's good. (pause) Imagine now that you find yourself in a beautiful place in nature. It may be a favorite or familiar place, or it may be a place you've never been before. Begin now to have a sense of this beautiful place.

Notice what you see or sense around you and how it feels to be here. Know that this is your own special place. Allow the sensations of being in this beautiful setting to fill your body with a joy and peace you may not have felt for some time. Just for this time allow yourself to sink deep into that peace. (pause) That's good.

Notice a path in front of you in this beautiful place, and begin to walk down the path. After walking a short way down the path it is easy to see a clearing with a campfire. Sit down in a comfortable place. Notice the sounds and smells around you.

Allow yourself to bring to mind what you have lost in this process of making this decision. You may have lost your innocence, or a relationship. That's important to you. You may have lost trust in yourself or someone else. You may have lost the experience of yourself as a mother. You may have lost the child you chose not to have. Allow yourself to feel these losses.

Reach out and find a basket next to you. Look around this beautiful clearing and find an object that represents each of your losses. Leave the loss of the potential child for last. A loss may be represented by a feather, a stone, a branch, a flower, a leaf, or any other object you can imagine or sense around you.

Place each object into the basket. As you do that, consider each loss one by one. Take a moment to speak to each object. What is the gift that came with each loss? What are you grateful for? Allow yourself to say goodbye and find a way to let go of each.

You may bury the object and return it to the earth

You may burn the object and allow it to return to the sky.

You may place the object into the river and allow the current to take it downstream.

You may find another way.

Release each object in your basket in whatever way is best for you.

Now turn and allow yourself to sense the child you will not have. (pause) See the child as you imagine it might be. Is it a boy or a girl? What color hair and eyes does this child have?

Feel warmth as the child takes your hand. Begin to walk down the path. Feel the sun, and hear the sounds as you walk. You look down and smile. The child smiles back and you feel perfect trust between you.

You begin to speak and realize that the child understands you without words. If you need to, ask this child for forgiveness for not being able to mother this child. (pause)

Listen with your heart for forgiveness. (pause)

As you come to the end of the path, sit down in the grass and take the child into your arms. Beside you are three gifts for this spirit child.

The first gift is a symbol of your love -- give it to the child. (pause)

The second gift is a symbol of protection -- give it to the child.

The last gift is for strength -- give this gift to the child.

Now hold your hands out and accept a gift from the child. It is a gift that symbolizes acceptance and forgiveness. Take this gift and place it into your heart where you can keep it forever. Now tell the child anything else you want to say. Feel the child communicate its feelings to you, heart to heart. (pause)

Now it is time to say goodbye. Open your arms and allow the child to stand and to begin to walk away from you. Then the child turns and waves goodbye. You wave goodbye, and a blessing passes between you. The child turns again and walks down the path and slowly disappears into a bright, white light. (pause)

Feel yourself releasing the spirit of the child. When you feel complete, allow the peace to return. Touch your heart and remember the gift you have received. Gently open your eyes and sit quietly until you are ready to leave this state of relaxation and imagination. It is good to know that you can return to this beautiful place in nature any time you want to complete your healing, and you can touch your heart at any time to feel the sense of peace and wholeness you created.

Used with permission from Pregnancy Options Workbook, www.pregnancyoptions.info, this section written by Charlotte Taft and Shelley Oram. © 2003.

9. Taking Care of Yourself After Abortion

Whether or not your decision to have an abortion was difficult, you're probably anticipating moving forward in your life. You may be wondering what to expect emotionally as you begin to understand the changes you've been through. Even though you have chosen not to be pregnant at this time, you are not exactly the same person as before you were pregnant. You have had to consider whether it is the right time to have a child, to look at your own goals and preferences, and assess your relationship to others. You may have thought about your own sense of what is right for your situation and it may have brought up some conflicts and challenges. How you integrate this experience into your life so that you can move forward will determine your emotional health. You may need others to talk to or help from a counselor or clergy member. Feelings are different for everyone and they will probably change over time. There is no *'right'* way to feel - just *'your'* way.

As you probably already know from your own life experiences, whenever an attachment or connection is broken off, feelings of loss can be expected. And, for women who have had an abortion, this is no exception. Being sure of your decision before helps your healing process after. While some women experience emotional pain, others do not. In fact, many women describe feelings of relief and look forward to a return of physical wellness and more energy. Both are normal responses.

If you are having a harder time, you will probably need to spend some more time figuring out how to feel about this experience. *We understand that a decision can be right and still feel sad.* Feeling sad when you're pregnant and don't want to be, is normal. And, grief is part of healing when you experience a loss. When you have an abortion you are giving something up - you are deciding to intervene and not have a child right now. You may feel the loss of an idealized pregnancy, of a relationship, of innocence. Remember, even when a loss is voluntary, it can still hurt. It is important to notice your feelings, even if they are painful or uncomfortable. Being honest with yourself is always the best path. Punishing yourself or feeling guilty is not necessary and is not good for you.

You can be relieved that you are not pregnant now and feel sad about it at the same time. This is normal. Don't confuse "sad" with "bad." Trust your ability to know what is right.

Did you know?

- Over 1/3 of American women will have an abortion by the age of 45.
- Women of all ages, races, economic backgrounds and religious beliefs have abortions.
- Over 1 million abortions occur in the United States each year.

Abortion is normal. However, your personal *experience of abortion* is unique. You can take comfort in knowing your feelings about abortion are shared by millions of women. But, because your decision to choose abortion may have been complex, your feelings about it may also be complex. These feelings are affected by many factors, including religion, your ethnic and cultural background, relationship with partner or family, age and your current life situation.

One of the most important factors to remember is that each pregnancy is unique-- the particular circumstances of this pregnancy are different from any other pregnancy. The same woman who chooses abortion at one time in her life may choose parenthood at another time. When pregnancy occurs, you may feel as if your entire past, present and future are up for examination. So, feelings after abortion may also have a great deal to do with other issues in your life that have not been addressed.

Whatever you were feeling, all the issues you were dealing with before your abortion will likely continue afterwards. If you are having problems in a relationship or with a family member, working to heal those problems, perhaps with the help of a counselor or trusted advisor, will be helpful. And, if you have been prescribed medication for depression or other mood problems, continue it as directed.

Expressing your feelings is crucial to emotional health. Sometimes, it's a matter of finding someone you can trust to be non-judgmental so you can share your feelings. If you are having trouble finding someone to talk to, call a national or local talkline, contact your clinic or family planning agency, or a member of the clergy.

"Whether we experience it or not, grief accompanies all the major changes in our lives. When we realize that we have grieved before and recovered, we see that we may recover this time as well. It is more natural to recover...than to halt in the tracks of grief forever...our expectation, willingness and beliefs are all essential to our recovery from grief. It is right to expect to recover, no matter how great the loss. Recovery is the normal way." -Judy Tatelbaum

Here are some elements of emotional health and ways to express your feelings as you heal. If you are having troubles in the grief process, these suggestions may be helpful.

Pay attention to your feelings

One of the first steps in emotional health is to identify the feelings you may be having. It is common to feel anger, empowerment, grief, guilt, relief, shame or spiritual questioning. Many women feel a sense of sadness and a sense of relief at the same time. For a few women, a feeling of loss may be felt weeks, months, even years after the loss of a pregnancy through abortion, miscarriage, stillbirth or adoption. Each deserves its own grief and healing process. If you are having emotional or spiritual pain after an abortion, a healing process is available. There are more and more resources in our society to support women who've lost a pregnancy. Attached to this piece, you will find some great Resources, including TalkLines and Internet sites offering healing thoughts, ideas and methods.

BE AWARE: *Also lurking on the Internet are many sites designed by people who do not support a woman's choice of abortion and want to make you feel bad about yourself.*

GO TO: www.ChoiceLinkUp.com for Pro-Choice, supportive sites

Letting go of blame - Taking Some Control:

Understand why and how you got pregnant when you weren't planning to.

For many women, becoming pregnant when they didn't want to is the most difficult part about having an abortion. Birth control measures may have failed you, or other circumstances may have found you unprotected from pregnancy. It is helpful to recognize you are not alone- you got pregnant under the same circumstances as many other women. No birth control method is perfect, and it's good to remember, that as humans, we are not perfect either. This may help you to let go of the shame and self-blame you may be experiencing.

Allow time to grieve.

Grief is different for everyone. Many people are surprised at how difficult the grieving process can be. There is no set timeframe. There is no right or wrong way to grieve. Allow yourself time to grieve, if you need it.

•**Talk to someone you can trust.** Sometimes, just being able to talk with someone who you know will not judge you is a great relief. Find others who are willing to truly listen and who will understand your feelings. *If you don't feel you have anyone, consider calling one of the Talklines we trust who can offer immediate support.*

•**Honor your experience.** You may want to create your own way to acknowledge your loss or changes. It may be as simple as releasing a symbolic object into the water, saying a prayer, lighting a candle, planting a tree, or writing a poem. It would be a way for you to memorialize the day and move forward.

•**Write a letter.**

To Yourself - If there are people who opposed your decision or if you are worried about regretting it later, take some time now to write about why you made the choice of abortion and how you felt about ending this pregnancy. Save this to read at a later date if you need to.

To the spirit of the child - Many women find they are talking to the spirit of the child inside of them. It may be helpful to write your thoughts on paper. Some women tell how they came to their decision, some ask for forgiveness. Some thank the spirit for the wisdom or thoughts they have had about life. Some write about the love they feel. Sometimes having a way to say goodbye is an important part of healing.

•**Share your experience with others.** You might find some of your own feelings or experiences in stories of other women who have dealt with painful post-abortion feelings. Web sites may be helpful in sharing stories and finding similar experiences, especially if you do not have support around you. See resources below or Use www.ChoiceLinkUp.com for supportive sites.

•**Embrace your Spirituality** What is Spirituality? People use many different names for their spirituality. One name is God. Others include Creator, Holy Spirit, Goddess, Greater Truth, Higher Power, Voice Within, Inner Light, Loving Spirit, Divine Feminine or Infinite Wisdom. Our spirituality is wise and loving, and we usually know when we are honoring it. It's important to discover your own truth and honor it.

"Making a choice about your pregnancy can be a gift of learning and growth. It is an invitation for you to develop a larger vision of yourself. It's a way to practice compassion and loving kindness toward yourself."

from "Abortion: Finding Your Own Truth" by Corrintha Rebecca Bennett, pamphlet from Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

Many faiths, including the Catholic Church, also teach that the conscience of the individual is supreme. "If you carefully examine your conscience and then decide abortion is the most moral act you can do at this time, you are not committing a sin." As with all religions, individuals must decide what their conscience says and their faith advises.

Did You Know? *In fact, Catholic women choose abortion in the same proportion as non-Catholic women.*

You may also find helpful: www.rcrc.org Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice

www.cath4choice.org Catholics for a Free Choice

Special Note to Women in an Abusive Relationship: *If you are afraid of being hurt by your partner or if he tries to make you feel bad about yourself, please get help before it gets worse. There are services in your area that can help. Call the National Domestic Abuse Line at 1-800-799-7233 or for sexual assault/incest, call 1-800-656-4673 or find a local number under Social Services in your yellow pages. Counseling for you and/or your partner are available, as well as shelters, support groups, and information.*

Adapted for use in this curriculum with permission from Northland Family Planning Centers. Portions of this handout adapted from "I Know I Made the Right Decision...but" by Charlotte Taft, *Imagine Counseling*, "Pregnancy Options Workbook" (www.pregnancyoptions.info), developed by Peg Johnston, and EXHALE, *Post Abortion Support talkline*.

Check out these helpful Internet sites:

www.peaceafterabortion.com: This site is based on the book, *Peace After Abortion*. Although most women who have abortions do not experience negative feelings, a significant number do. You will find information here to help you understand the origin of your emotional and spiritual pain. You will also find the stories of other women who have experienced emotional pain related to an abortion.

www.pregnancyoptions.info: This comprehensive website and workbook, is helpful for those wishing to sort out varying emotions before and after an abortion. In fact, ask for a copy at the reception desk.

www.hopeclinic.org/publications: This site offers several helpful pamphlets you can order to assist you in working through your own emotions, and offers reading for others involved in the abortion experience, such as family and partners.

www.northlandfamilyplanning.com: This web site is filled with helpful information about and thoughtful considerations of all facets of abortion health and total reproductive care. In addition, there are sections for friends, family and male partners who need support too.

Call these supportive Talk-Lines:

BACKLINE - This confidential and free Talkline is dedicated to addressing the broad range of experiences and emotions surrounding pregnancy, parenting, adoption and abortion to women and their loved ones. Talkline services, including post abortion help, are available seven days a week to callers nationwide. CALL 1- 888-493-0092 www.yourbackline.org

EXHALE - This confidential and free Talkline is available to women and girls who had abortions, and to their partners, friends, allies and family members. Finding the right person to talk to can be hard. Exhale offers support

for you and your experience without judgment, without bias, and without a political or moral agenda. CALL 1-866-4-EXHALE (439-4253) www.4exhale.org .

Additional Resources:

Peace After Abortion: A Pro-Choice Self-Help Guide for Women and Men, by Ava Torre-Bueno, LCSW, Pimpernel Press PO Box 33110 San Diego, CA 92163-3110 or 1-800-352-6305 www.peaceafterabortion.com

The Healing Choice: Your Guide to Emotional Recovery After an Abortion, by Candace DePuy, PhD and Dana Dovitch, PhD, Simon & Schuster, available in bookstores or 1-800-999-7909.

Unspeakable Losses: Understanding the Experience of Pregnancy Loss, Miscarriage, and Abortion by Kim Kluger-Bell W. W. Norton Book & Co., Inc. 1998

“Abortion: Finding Your Own Truth” by Corrintha Rebecca Bennett, and other pamphlet from Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice 1025 Vermont Ave. NW #1130 Washington DC 20005 (202) 628-7700.